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Just a drill

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Officers with the Illinois Department of Corrections prepare to participate in a hostage negotiation drill Wednesday on the former Jacksonville Developmental Center grounds near Community Park. The IDOC will be holding drills through Friday. During the training, access to the area will be limited.

Two buildings on the grounds of the former Jacksonville Developmental Center were sectioned off by yellow police tape and officers outfitted in tactical gear stood with batons and protective shields at the ready Wednesday during the first of a three-day training session.

The Illinois Department of Corrections will be running hostage negotiation training with its officers and staff through Friday on the grounds. During that time, access around the training area will be limited.

Wednesday was the first time the IDOC has used the JDC buildings for training, said Tiffany Whitten, a statewide hostage negotiation coordinator.

"It is ideal," she said. "It's a great layout for us and it's also great because (using the grounds for training) allows the buildings to be used."

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Although it was a first for state officials, local authorities have used the empty buildings and grounds for training purposes several times since the development closed in November 2012.

“We have done training out there ... both (the Jacksonville Police) department and our special response team,” said Jacksonville Police Lt. Rodney Cox.

Cox, who is team commander of the Jacksonville Special Response Team, said the team utilizes the former JDC grounds at least twice each year for building- and room-clearing practices and scenario-based drills.

The team was formed about 10 years ago and its members include officers from both the city police department and deputies from the Morgan County Sheriff’s Department. The team trains once each month in various locations.

For example, the team will use abandoned homes around the city for training and has participated in active shooter drills at schools in the area.

“We don’t want to train at the same place every time,” Cox said.

IDOC will hold another training session in the spring, said Whitten, possibly on the JDC grounds if permission to use the grounds is granted.